



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS
AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AFFAIRS

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An Overview of the Merida Initiative, 2008-Present”

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Chairman Salmon, Ranking Member Sires, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. In every society, citizen security underpins economic stability and allows trade, investment, energy development, and education exchanges to flourish. The partnership forged between the United States and the Government of Mexico over the past six years under the Merida Initiative exemplifies how strengthening citizen security supports these broader objectives. We have worked together to strengthen the capacity of Mexico's justice sector to counter organized crime and its violent and corrupting effects. Now is an excellent opportunity to recognize our shared accomplishments, acknowledge the common challenges we face, and look forward to the progression of our partnership.

Development of the Merida Initiative:

The Merida Initiative was conceived in 2007 in an effort to enhance collaboration against the drug trade and build more effective justice sector institutions in Mexico. At the time of the program's inception, cartel-related violence had been increasing dramatically and corruption was a threat to rule of law. Mexican institutions were ill-equipped to deal with the challenges they faced. In 2008, Mexico took the important first step of passing constitutional reforms to overhaul its entire justice sector including the police, judicial system, and corrections at the federal, state and local levels. Mexico's institutional reforms and its objective of building strong institutions that its citizens can depend on to deliver justice provided a foundation for U.S. cooperation.

Our Merida resources have helped advance Mexico's implementation of these reforms. Since the inception of Merida, the United States Government has delivered about \$1.2 billion worth of training, capacity building, and equipment. By no means did we go it alone: For every \$1 of foreign assistance that America invested in our shared security goals, the Government of Mexico dedicated at least \$10 of its own. Because our assistance was designed jointly with the Government of Mexico, many programs formed

integral parts of Mexico's justice sector reforms and today enjoy a high level of sustainability.

Our partnership with Mexico has demonstrated results. With our assistance, the Government of Mexico has: Built a stronger legal framework through the training of over 8,500 federal justice sector personnel; augmented the professionalization of police units by providing training to more than 19,000 federal and state police officers, 4,000 of which are federal investigators; expanded secure incarceration at the federal level from five facilities with a capacity of 3,500 to 14 facilities with a capacity of 20,000; improved the detection of narcotics, arms, and money, reaching almost \$3 billion in illicit goods seized; and provided civic education and ethics training to more than 700,000 Mexican students. Since 2009, Mexico has apprehended more than 50 senior and mid-level drug trafficking organization (DTO) leaders, significantly disrupting all major Mexican DTOs.

In line with Mexico's evolving capabilities, the Merida Initiative has undergone several planned transitions. These include: 1) a transition away from major equipment assistance intended to increase the government's reach toward additional training and capacity building for personnel; and 2) a shift from focusing assistance on federal institutions to an increasing emphasis on state and local government capabilities. The Merida Initiative continues to be structured around the four pillar framework: 1) Disrupting the operational capacity of organized crime; 2) Institutionalizing Mexico's capacity to sustain the rule of law and protect human rights; 3) Creating a 21st century border; and 4) Building strong and resilient communities. This framework, combined with the shift toward training and an emphasis on building capacity at the state and local level, will be the basis for our security cooperation with the Peña Nieto Administration going forward.

The Merida Initiative in 2013 and Beyond:

Deliberations between our governments on how to proceed under the Merida Initiative have been productive and comprehensive. President Peña Nieto and his Administration are committed to continuing our close collaboration on security issues under the four-pillar Merida framework, with a sharper focus on crime prevention and rule of law. The Peña Nieto administration has proposed a security strategy which includes establishing a Commission for the Prevention of Crime, revising the practice of pre-trial detention to better protect human rights, strengthening the Attorney General's office, and creating a National Human Rights Program. The strategy also focuses on police professionalization by seeking to create a career professional service, consolidating police certification and vetting, elaborating protocols for police action, and creating a national training plan for police. These elements track well with the planning and direction of INL programming under the Merida Initiative for professionalized and credible civilian security.

To help Mexico build policing capacity for its communities, we are putting in place the building blocks to expand police training to the state and municipal level. We have strengthened police academies in the states of Chihuahua, Sonora, Nuevo Leon, and Puebla by providing equipment and training materials, enabling them to serve as the backbone for training programs and to conduct regional training. We are building our joint state training program around this regional structure. This will not only enable us to provide training more effectively, but will enhance cooperation between law enforcement officials in neighboring states as they implement reforms.

Building on the Peña Nieto Administration's agenda for police professionalization, we are prepared to work with the Government of Mexico to enhance and professionalize existing law enforcement institutions to develop federal standards for Mexican officials in the areas of recruitment, training, discipline and promotion. We would partner with

the Mexican Government to provide international experts in policing standards and best practices, and facilitate regional working groups that integrate state, local, and federal entities to derive Mexico-specific standards. These standards would be designed to further police professionalization, facilitate greater observance of civil and human rights, and foster trust among the Mexican public in its police.

We also continue to build on the success of several ongoing programs. For example, Mexico's federal corrections system is now a recognized international leader in corrections reform, with eight federal facilities already certified by the independent American Correctional Association. Mexico has begun to offer corrections officer training to its Central American neighbors, and the first class of Central American (Guatemalan) corrections officers graduated from Mexico's academy in July of 2012. The reforms already underway, including the creation of an objective prisoner classification system and the construction of new facilities, are making great strides. Mexico's success in reforming the corrections systems at the federal level can serve as the launching point for supporting similar reforms at the state level, where significant challenges remain. We will support Mexico in assessing state facilities and in its efforts to undertake similar reforms at the state level.

To enhance our bilateral efforts to build a 21st century border, we will continue to offer capacity-building support to Mexican law enforcement agencies involved in border security, further enhancing their ability to interdict illicit narcotics, arms, and money. We have offered specialized training for police and Mexican Customs officials that address advanced border security and import/export processing techniques and methodologies. This training is designed to produce a cadre of instructors who can then provide training within their home agencies, multiplying the effect of our initial investment. We are prepared to support Mexico in their efforts to strengthen the southern border, an area the Peña Nieto administration has prioritized.

On rule of law, we will focus on supporting Mexico in its transition to an accusatorial justice system, build on our efforts with the federal judiciary, and help to improve effectiveness in case management and court administration. Mexico's ambitious effort to reform its justice system by 2016 is in mid-stream and requires sustained focus and resources.

We will continue supporting Mexico's efforts to improve information sharing among its agencies involved in the fight against money laundering and illicit finance, a priority area for the Peña Nieto administration. Enhanced Mexican interagency coordination will lead to more prosecutions and cash seized. We have already provided funding for the training of the Financial Intelligence Unit's (UIF) personnel, sophisticated financial analysis software, and the accompanying computer hardware. Given the expanded responsibilities of the UIF under the new anti-money laundering legislation passed in late 2012, additional support may be needed to provide upgrades and expand their data center.

Complementary to our assistance at the institutional level, we will also continue to support local communities by promoting behavioral changes for improving rule of law from the ground up, such as through our Culture of Lawfulness program. This program offers a civic education curriculum to schools in 29 of the 31 states in Mexico.

Conclusion:

We are currently forging a new way ahead for the Merida Initiative with President Peña Nieto and his team. The discussions and collaboration have been frank and positive and the conversation is ongoing. Building strong and able justice sector institutions capable of dealing with organized crime and the accompanying violence and corruption, is a difficult and long-term endeavor. It takes years of dedicated and sustained work across numerous institutions and sectors, the political will to affect change, and the

resources and stamina to see it through. Over the course of the Merida Initiative, the U.S.-Mexico bilateral security relationship has proven steadfast and collaborative while including some notable transitions and changes along the way. Our support to Mexico over the past six years has achieved positive results, and I am confident that our collaborative efforts can continue.

Thank you, Chairman Salmon, Ranking Member Sires and other distinguished Representatives for your time. I will do my best to address your questions.